PATTERNS OF POWER · THE SETTLEMENT PROTOCOL

The Elite That Owned Nothing

The Soviet Nomenklatura, the Binding Power of Having Nothing to Lose, and the Test of 1991 That Returns a Number

HELD AS TESTED, NOT REVEALED

THE ELITE THAT OWNED NOTHING
PREFACE

Preface: the collaboration, and what this study is for

On how the work was made, the claim it makes, and the discipline it is held in.

This study is part of the Patterns of Power series, and it is a collaboration. The research direction and the judgement are the author's; the historical synthesis, the drafting, and much of the scholarly retrieval were done with Claude, Anthropic's model, and every load-bearing fact in it was checked against the record — independently, for this paper — before it was used. The method is stated openly because it is an emerging form of knowledge production and ought to be visible rather than concealed.

This study has an unusual origin, and it is worth stating, because it is itself a small piece of evidence for the thing the study argues. The case arrived from *outside* this project. A separate body of work — on how the Soviet Union governed its Baltic periphery, built with its own vocabulary and its own concerns — reached, from a cold start and by a different road, the same structural mechanism that this series has spent many studies developing: the finding that a durable order does not need anyone to consciously hold it together, because each person inside it, in defending his own position, thereby defends the whole. Two separate inquiries, on two different subjects, in two different vocabularies, arrived at one mechanism. That convergence is the kind of thing this series takes most seriously, because when two independent investigations of unconnected material keep surfacing the same structure, the structure is more likely to be real and less likely to be an artefact of either investigation's assumptions. This paper takes the Soviet case, verifies it independently, and works it as a study in its own right — because the Soviet order turns out to be not merely another example of the mechanism but the case that

inverts one of the series' standing assumptions, and the inversion is a genuine addition to the framework.

The claim, stated plainly, is this. Every durable ruling arrangement this series has studied binds its powerful members by giving each of them *something to lose* — land, an office with revenues, a title, a hereditary stake — so that each defends the arrangement because the arrangement is what secures his stake. The Soviet nomenklatura did the opposite. It bound its elite by ensuring that each member had *nothing else* — no land, no capital, nothing heritable, only a revocable post on a list held one level up — and this made the elite *more* reliable than any landed aristocracy, not less, because a man whose only possession is his position cannot fund dissent without spending the very thing he would be dissenting to keep. That is one finding. The second is its mirror image: an elite bound by having nothing is maximally loyal while the centre that issues its positions is solvent, and maximally *disposable* the instant that centre falters — because its loyalty was never to the order but only to whoever was currently issuing the appointments. The two findings are one structural fact seen from either side of a collapse, and the collapse of 1991 tests it in a way almost no case in history offers so cleanly: it lets us count how many of the men who ran these republics for the Soviet Union went on to run them for their own new nations. The framework is held as tested, not revealed. And the study carries one discipline above all, stated here and enforced at the end: to find that the same men held power under a new flag is a claim about *mechanism*, never about *merit* — several of these men broke the old order at real personal risk and were then freely elected, and explaining the structural continuity of their positions must never be allowed to launder or diminish what genuinely changed.

THE ELITE THAT OWNED NOTHING
SECTION ONE

The puzzle

An elite that owned nothing, inherited nothing, and could be dismissed by a telephone call held together more reliably than aristocracies with vast estates to defend — and then, the moment the centre wavered, changed flags overnight almost without a fight. How can the same feature make an elite both the most loyal and the most disposable?

Set two kinds of ruling class side by side. The first is the familiar kind: a landed aristocracy, or a class of officeholders with estates and revenues and titles they pass to their sons. Such a class has a great deal to lose, and the standard understanding — which this series has largely shared — is that this is exactly what binds it: each nobleman defends the order because the order is what makes his estate his, and a man with eight square miles and a title will fight to keep the arrangement that grants them. The second kind is stranger and is the subject of this study: a ruling class that owns *nothing*. Its members hold no land, no capital, no share in any enterprise, nothing they can pass to a child. What each of them has is a *position* — a post on a list maintained by the level above him — and everything that comes with the position (the better apartment, the car, the access to closed shops, the standing) arrives with the appointment and vanishes with it. A man of this class can be stripped of everything he has by a decision taken one level up, communicated, in the end, by a telephone call.

Intuition says the first class should be the more reliable — it has more to lose, more skin in the game, more reason to defend the order. And intuition is wrong, which is the puzzle. The class that owned nothing was *more* reliable than the landed classes, not less. For thirty-five years it administered a vast territory, signed the instruments, ran the institutions, and did not defect — even though its members could have defected at a fraction of the cost that defection would have imposed on a landed lord, having no estate to be confiscated and no title to be attainted. And then comes the second half of the puzzle, which makes the first half sharper rather than

resolving it. When the centre that issued the positions finally wavered — when, in the years around 1991, the power in the capital that maintained the lists began to fail — this same supremely reliable elite changed sides almost overnight, with astonishingly little violence, and a great many of its members simply carried on in equivalent positions under the new order they had just helped bring in. The class that would not defect for thirty-five years defected almost instantly and almost bloodlessly the moment the centre faltered.

How can one feature — owning nothing but a revocable position — make an elite simultaneously the most loyal ruling class in this collection *and* the most disposable, the least likely to defect while the centre holds and the least likely to fight for it once the centre slips? That is the puzzle, and its answer is a single mechanism that this study will show operating in both directions, because the reliability and the disposability are not two facts but one fact seen from either side of the moment the centre broke.

THE ELITE THAT OWNED NOTHING
SECTION TWO

The framework, for a reader who has not met it

The default, binding by conferral, and the possibility of binding by withholding.

Everything here rests on a few ideas, built from nothing for a reader who has met none of them.

Start with a problem that every ruling arrangement has to solve, and that this series calls the problem of *elite coordination*. A ruling order is not one person; it is many powerful people — officials, commanders, administrators, men with the capacity to disrupt or defect. The order faces the constant danger that some of these powerful people will break away, combine against the top, or simply refuse to cooperate, and no ruler can personally force all of his own powerful subordinates all of the time. So the order needs its powerful members to hold *themselves* in line — to have, each of them, a private reason to keep cooperating rather than to defect. When an order achieves this, something remarkable happens: it holds together *without anyone consciously holding it together*, because each powerful member, pursuing his own advantage, finds that his advantage lies in defending his position, and in defending his position he defends the whole arrangement that grants it. This series calls that self-reproducing alignment **the default** — the arrangement runs by default, reproducing itself without a conspiracy, among people who need not like or trust one another, because each is individually better off inside it than defecting from it. The default is a tendency, not a law; some orders achieve it more completely than others, and the degree to which an order has achieved it is a large part of what makes it durable.

The ordinary way to produce the default is by **conferral**: give each powerful member something valuable that he holds *through* the arrangement and would lose if the arrangement fell. Give the nobleman an estate, the officer a command with

revenues, the chief his lands and his court — and each now has a stake that ties him to the order, because the order is the thing that makes his stake good. This series has studied many such settlements, and they nearly all work this way: the order buys the loyalty of its potential rivals by conferring on each of them something he would forfeit if he defected. Conferral has a cost — the order must actually part with land, revenue, or office — and much of the series' work has been on the terms of these bargains: what exactly was given, and what was demanded in return.

Now the possibility this study is built on, which conferral's logic tends to hide. If the point is to give each powerful member a reason not to defect, there are *two* ways to do it, not one. You can give him something he would lose by defecting — conferral. Or you can ensure he has *nothing else* — no independent base of any kind from which a defection could be launched or funded — so that defection is not so much punished as rendered *impossible*, because the only asset he holds is the position itself, and to spend it in opposition would be to destroy the one thing he has. Call this second way **binding by withholding**. Conferral binds by giving the member a stake; withholding binds by ensuring the member has no stake *except* the position, and therefore no platform from which to act against the hand that grants the position. The two produce loyalty by opposite means — one by making the member rich enough to have something to protect, the other by keeping him poor enough to have nothing to fight with. This study argues that the Soviet nomenklatura was the purest case of binding by withholding that the historical record offers, and that it reveals both why such binding is unusually tight and why it is unusually brittle.

THE ELITE THAT OWNED NOTHING
SECTION THREE

The historical spine

What happened, for a reader who knows nothing of it.

The Soviet Union governed itself through a system of appointment lists called the **nomenklatura** — a Russian word that means, roughly, "a schedule of names." The system was simple in principle and total in reach. For every position of any importance in the state, the economy, the military, the security organs, the universities, the newspapers, the arts, and the collective farms, there existed a *list*, maintained by a party committee at the level above, of the posts that committee had the power to fill and the vetted people eligible to fill them. To be somebody in the Soviet Union was to be *on a list* — to hold a post that some committee one level up had placed you in and could remove you from. The people who held these listed positions were, collectively, the nomenklatura: a ruling and administrative class of perhaps one and a half per cent of the population, a few million people across the whole union, who ran everything.

What a nomenklatura position gave its holder is the crux of the whole study, and the negative facts matter most. The holder owned no land. He owned no capital and no share in any enterprise. He held nothing heritable — his son might get an easier path to a good institute, but no position and no asset passed down, and a father's political disgrace was an active harm to the children rather than a neutral inheritance. What the holder *had* was a salary, an apartment better than the years-long queue would otherwise have produced, and — in the higher ranks — a car and a driver, access to closed shops stocked with goods ordinary citizens could not get, a place at a good sanatorium, superior medical care, and the standing that came with the post. Every one of these arrived with the appointment and left with it. The privileges were real and, in a society of chronic shortage, very valuable; but they were *attached to the position*, not owned by the person, and the person held the position at the pleasure of the committee above him. This has been confirmed in the historical literature many

times over: the nomenklatura's apartments, dachas, cars, closed shops, and sanatoria were the standard furniture of the system, and all of it was tied to the post.

This study takes its sharpest evidence from the Soviet Union's Baltic periphery — the republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940, occupied by Germany during the war, and reincorporated in 1944, and held until 1991 — because the periphery shows the mechanism under the additional strain of *national* difference between rulers and ruled, and because the Baltic case ends in an unusually clean natural experiment. The union governed its national republics through a deliberate design of *crossed chains of command*, which the following sections will lay out; the local elite privately called the man who supervised them, in the tsarist term for an imperial official set over a subject province, the "governor-general." Whenever a member of the local elite began to acquire a *base of his own* — a policy, a following, a constituency independent of the appointment — the order removed him, under a charge, "bourgeois nationalism," that it had drafted in advance for exactly that offence. The Estonian party leadership was purged this way in 1950; the Latvian "national communists" around Eduards Berklavs were purged in 1959–62. And then, in the years from 1988 to 1991, the order came apart — not through a rising of the ruled but through the defection of the very men holding the positions — and the Baltic republics became independent nations, at which point the natural experiment delivers its number: a countable proportion of the men who had run these republics for the Soviet Union went on to run them, in the same buildings, for their own newly independent peoples.

THE ELITE THAT OWNED NOTHING
SECTION FOUR

What the elite was given, which was almost nothing

The endowment stripped to a single revocable component.

Return to the negative facts and dwell on them, because the whole mechanism lives in what the nomenklatura member did *not* have. Set his endowment against the other settlements this series has studied, and the contrast is total. An Ottoman cavalryman held a *timar*, a grant of land-revenue: it reverted to the state when he died, so it was not heritable, but while he lived it was real income that was *his*, a base he controlled. A chief under a colonial settlement might receive square miles of land in something the treaty called freehold — a genuine, ownable, defensible estate. A tribal leader might be made the largest landowner in his country; an emir might keep his court, his religion, and his revenues, losing only the right to be irremovable. Every one of those arrangements bound the potential rival by *conferral*: it gave him a real asset, a base, something he owned and would lose if the order fell, and therefore something he would defend the order to keep — but also, note, something he could in principle have *used against* the order, a platform from which opposition could be funded.

The nomenklatura member had none of this. His entire endowment was the position and the position's perquisites, and the position was an entry on a list held one level up. He could not finance an opposition, because he had no capital and no independent income; the flat, the car, and the access were not convertible into a war chest and would vanish the moment he was removed. He could not build a regional power base, because his authority was delegated from above and terminated from above. He could not pass anything to a son who might carry on a dissident line, because nothing was heritable. He could not even fall back on private wealth in retirement, because there was no private wealth to fall back on. His whole standing

in the world was the position, and the position belonged, in the last analysis, to the committee that had listed him. Strip away the position and you strip away everything at once — salary, home, car, shops, medicine, standing — in a single administrative act.

This is the endowment reduced to one revocable component, and it is why the Soviet case shows the mechanism of binding-by-withholding more clearly than any other. In a landed order, a rebel who is stripped of his office still has his ancestral lands, his kin network, his private fortune, his standing in his region — a base from which to fight on. In the nomenklatura, a man stripped of his position has, by design, nothing: no land, no fortune, no independent standing, not even an unimpaired family, since his disgrace harmed his children. The order had deliberately ensured that its powerful members possessed no asset except the one it could revoke, and this, counter-intuitively, is the source of the elite's extraordinary reliability, as the next section shows.

THE ELITE THAT OWNED NOTHING
SECTION FIVE

Why having nothing bound them tighter than having something

The mechanism of binding by withholding, run down the chain.

The framework's test for whether an order has achieved the default is to run an explicit audit down the chain of power, asking at each link: *does this man, in defending his own position, thereby defend the whole arrangement?* Run that audit down the Soviet chain and the answer at every link is yes, and the reason is always the same — the man has nothing but the position, so defending the position and defending the order are literally the same act.

Take the links in turn. The collective farm chairman held his post from the district committee and from nothing else; he had no title to the land, no capital in the farm, no independent trade. If the arrangement ended, he was a man with an agricultural qualification and no farm — so his every interest lay in the arrangement continuing, and in his own compliance within it. The factory director's authority was entirely a function of a chain of supply and instruction reaching down from a ministry in Moscow; he did not own the plant, could not sell its product, had no customers he had found for himself. His standing existed because the ministry existed, so he defended the ministry's order by defending his own place in it. The republican minister's ministry existed because the union constitution had created it and could abolish it. The censor, the security officer, the newspaper editor, the academician, the theatre director — each held an appointment, and each had watched a predecessor who misjudged the boundary lose everything. And the native first secretary at the top of the visible pyramid held a position whose entire local value consisted in his being *the man Moscow dealt with* — worth an enormous amount inside the republic, and precisely nothing if Moscow stopped dealing with him.

At every link the same structure: the man's whole endowment is the position, the position is granted and revoked from above, and therefore the man's self-interest is perfectly aligned with the continuation of the order and with his own obedience inside it. This is the default achieved with unusual purity, and the reason it is so pure is exactly the withholding. A landed chief *could* in principle finance an opposition from his estate; the question of his loyalty is a live one, settled by his calculation of gain and loss. A nomenklatura member *cannot* finance anything, because the only thing he possesses is the position, and to spend it in opposition is to destroy it. His loyalty is therefore not really a matter of calculation at all; it is a matter of there being no available alternative to calculate toward. The counter-intuitive claim can now be stated as a mechanism rather than a paradox: *an elite with no independent base is more reliable than a landed one, not less, because there is no base from which a dissent could be funded, and so no dissent is funded.* The order did not need to win the loyalty of its elite by making defection unattractive; it had engineered a situation in which defection was, for want of any base to launch it from, barely possible.

THE ELITE THAT OWNED NOTHING
SECTION SIX

What was done to the men who acquired a base

The proof of the mechanism: the offence was always the same offence.

The clearest proof that binding-by-withholding was the actual mechanism — and not merely a description after the fact — is what the order did on the rare occasions when someone began, however modestly, to acquire a *second* source of standing. It did the same thing every time, and the offence it punished was always the same offence: the accumulation of a base independent of the appointment.

The instructive case is the Latvian one, and it must be told carefully, because recent scholarship has complicated the old version of it. In the late 1950s a group within the Latvian Communist Party, informally led by Eduards Berklavs, the deputy chairman of the republic's council of ministers, began a programme that the framework would recognise instantly as the building of a local base. They passed regulations requiring party and government officials to learn Latvian; they moved to restrict the in-migration of workers from elsewhere in the union; they sought to redirect investment toward local needs — housing, schools, hospitals — rather than the great union-wide industrial projects. In framework terms, they were acquiring exactly what the withholding was designed to deny them: a policy of their own, a constituency of their own, a following that looked to *them* rather than to the centre. The telling detail is that Berklavs, before he did this, had been highly regarded and was slated for promotion — even, by some accounts, marked as heir apparent to the top of the republican government and a future posting to Moscow. He was not an enemy the order had failed to weed out; he was a capable and favoured man. And the moment he built a base, that changed. In 1959 he was removed, and over 1959–62 the Latvian national communists were purged — some two thousand party members

lost their positions — and Latvian communism with independent local roots ended with it.

Here the honest complication must be stated, because this series verifies its load-bearing cases and reports what it finds. The traditional account held that the Soviet premier Khrushchev personally ordered the purge; newer archival scholarship argues, on the contrary, that the purge was driven by the Stalinist old guard and the Russian military establishment *within* Latvia, and possibly against Khrushchev's own preference. This dispute about *who drove* the purge does not touch the framework's point, which is about *what was punished*: whoever pulled the trigger, the offence that got the Berklavs group destroyed was the building of an independent local base, and the charge under which they were destroyed — "bourgeois nationalism" — was the standing accusation the doctrine kept ready for exactly that offence. The structural fact survives the historiographical dispute intact: a favoured, capable elite faction was annihilated at the moment, and because, it acquired a second source of standing.

The Estonian party had been purged the same way nine years earlier, in 1950. And the contrast between the two republics afterwards is itself evidence for the mechanism. In Estonia, the man who held the first secretaryship for decades after 1950 had learned the lesson of the earlier purge and drew the correct conclusion — which was not to *stop* seeking room for Estonian institutions, but to stop *announcing* it, never giving the centre an occasion to name what he was doing. Estonia consequently kept somewhat more of its cultural and linguistic apparatus than Latvia did, precisely because its elite had been taught a decade sooner where the line ran. The order's answer to the problem of capable men was therefore not to prevent them from existing — it needed them, and produced them in quantity — but to prevent any of them from acquiring a second source of standing, and to remove, under a pre-drafted charge, any who did. That is binding-by-withholding enforced: the order tolerated ability and rewarded it, and destroyed only the one thing it could not permit, which was an independent base.

THE ELITE THAT OWNED NOTHING
SECTION SEVEN

The crossed chains, and why no one inside held enough to defect

The design that guaranteed no local figure combined violence, wealth, and information.

Binding-by-withholding at the level of the individual position was reinforced, in the governance of the national republics, by a deliberate design at the level of the whole apparatus: the chains of command were *crossed*, laid deliberately across one another so that no single person inside a republic ever held the ingredients of an independent power together. The design is worth setting out, because it shows the same logic — deny any potential rival a base — operating architecturally rather than personally.

There were, in effect, four chains. The first was the visible party pyramid headed by the republic's own first secretary, usually a native of the republic: he had political authority and public standing, but no independent command of force. The second was the office of the *second secretary* — an official sent from Moscow, generally a Russian, who supervised the local elite, controlled the machinery of appointments, and oversaw the security organs. This is the figure the local Lithuanian elite privately called the "governor-general," borrowing the tsarist term for an imperial official set over a subject province — a striking piece of usage, because it is the word the administrators of the claim that this was *not* an empire used, among themselves, for the man who proved that it was. The second secretary had the appointments and the security organs but no local constituency of his own. The third chain was economic and ran past the republic entirely: the great enterprises of "all-union subordination" reported directly to ministries in Moscow, took their targets and their inputs from them, and were often staffed with labour brought in from outside — so that a factory director in a Baltic city answered to a ministry a thousand miles away, not to the republic he stood in. The fourth chain was the security committee and the armed

forces, with their own reporting lines, their own housing, their own shops, and, in the Baltic, a very large presence.

Read the four together and the design is unmistakable, and it has a name in the general study of how power is kept from concentrating: *divide and balance*, installed deliberately in a periphery. The first secretary had authority and no force. The second secretary had the appointments and the security organs and no constituency. The ministries had the capital and no local jurisdiction. The security committee had the information and no economy. No one inside the republic held violence, wealth, and trusted information together — and every one of the four chains terminated in the same distant city. A local figure who might have wanted to defect, or to build toward independence, found that he personally controlled only one of the four ingredients of an autonomous power, and that the other three ran through hands that answered to Moscow. The crossed chains were binding-by-withholding written at the scale of the whole apparatus: not only was each individual's endowment a single revocable position, but the apparatus was arranged so that no combination of positions available to any local person added up to a base.

One scholarly claim about the second-secretary institution deserves particular note, and equally particular caution. On the specialist account, this institution — the "governor-general," the union's principal device for supervising a national republic — was *first introduced in the Baltic republics* and only afterwards extended across the rest of the non-Slavic union. If so, the implication is arresting: the periphery usually treated as the union's most European and least typical would have been the *laboratory* in which its most typical instrument of imperial control was designed. This study flags the claim as important and as *not fully settled*, because the specialist's own work states the timing more than one way — his article dates the institution's introduction to the Baltic "during Stalin's tenure" with extension across the union in the 1950s, while the description of his monograph dates the institution's establishment to Khrushchev in the mid-1950s. The "Baltic as laboratory" claim is real, traceable to serious scholarship, and genuinely interesting; it is also resting on a body of work whose own dating is not perfectly consistent, and it should be verified in the underlying monograph before the framework builds anything heavy on it. It is offered here as a suggestive possibility, not an established fact.

THE ELITE THAT OWNED NOTHING
SECTION EIGHT

Why an appointed elite defects instantly

The mirror image: the same feature that made the elite reliable made it disposable.

Now the second finding, which is the more important, and which follows from the first by simple inversion. The feature that made the nomenklatura the most reliable elite in this collection — that its every member's whole endowment was a revocable position and nothing else — is the same feature that made it, the instant the centre wavered, the most *disposable*. Reliability and disposability are not two facts about this elite. They are one fact seen from either side of the moment the centre broke.

See why by comparing, one more time, the appointed elite with the landed one, but now at the moment of crisis rather than in the calm. A landed elite defends an old order in a crisis because the old order is what makes its *title* good. The nobleman's estate is his because some authority — a crown, a charter, a body of law — issued the title that says so, and that authority is embedded in the existing order. Remove the order that issued the deed, and the deed itself becomes a question: a new regime may not honour the old titles, may redistribute the land, may ask by what right the nobleman holds what he holds. So the landed elite has a real reason to *fight for* the old order in its crisis, because the old order is the thing that validates its property, and this is precisely why landed settlements can hold for generations even under men who privately resent them — the resentful lord still defends the order, because the order is what makes his lands his. The bind requires only alignment, not affection.

An appointed elite has no title. Its entire endowment is an entry on a register, and an entry on a register can simply be *re-registered*. When the old centre fails and a new source of appointments appears — a sovereign parliament, a popular front, a

restored republic — the appointed official does not have to defend anything against the new power, because he owns nothing that the new power threatens. He has no deed that a new regime might refuse to honour; he has only a position, and the new regime has positions too. The same man can occupy an equivalent position in the new structure at essentially no cost, because there was never anything that had to be transferred, revalidated, or defended in a court. So the appointed elite has no reason to fight for the old order in its crisis — the old order was never the guarantor of a property he must protect; it was merely the current issuer of a position he can get re-issued elsewhere.

State it generally, because it explains something about the whole Soviet collapse and not only the Baltic: *an elite bound by having nothing is maximally loyal while the centre is solvent and maximally disposable the instant it is not, because its loyalty was never to the order but only to whoever is currently issuing the appointments.* This is what it means, concretely, to say that the Soviet order was a structure of *positions* rather than a structure of *beliefs*. The elite did not hold the order together because it believed the doctrine — the doctrine, as this study will show, evaporated without anyone's position being disturbed. It held the order together because, and only for as long as, the centre was the sole issuer of the positions that were its members' whole endowment. Change the issuer, and the elite re-sources its positions to the new issuer without a pang, because a position transfers and a title must be defended, and this elite had never been given a title. That is why the Soviet periphery changed flags, in the years around 1991, in a remarkably short time and with remarkably little fighting — except in the few places where the security organs, the men who *were* the instruments of force, were themselves the incumbents with something to lose.

THE ELITE THAT OWNED NOTHING
SECTION NINE

The test in 1991, which returns a number

The natural experiment: did the same men hold power under the new flag?

Here the case offers something this series almost never gets: a clean, quantified test of its central claim about the default. The claim is that a settled order is a structure of positions and not a set of beliefs — that what holds the elite is the alignment of each member's position with the whole, not shared conviction in a doctrine. That claim makes a sharp, checkable prediction about a collapse. If the order was really a structure of positions, then when the doctrine evaporates, the *positions should carry over* — the same people should hold equivalent power under the new arrangement, in the same buildings, with a new legitimating story, because it was never the story that held them. If, on the other hand, the order was a structure of beliefs, the collapse of the belief should sweep out the people who held it. So: look at 1991 and after, and count. Did the same men hold power under the new flag?

The comparative research on post-Soviet Baltic elites returns a number, and it is decisive. On the data assembled by the political scientist Anton Steen and reported in the comparative literature, about half of the new Baltic elite of the 1990s was drawn from people who can be counted as former members of the nomenklatura broadly defined. In the two northern republics the continuity was especially stark: roughly 53 per cent of Estonia's new leadership and about 55 per cent of Latvia's had a communist and senior-cadre past, with Lithuania's share around 44 per cent. And the reverse figure settles the argument, because it measures the opposite phenomenon — genuine newcomers. "Pure" upward mobility, meaning people with no party card and no prior senior position who reached the top under the new order, accounted for only about 1 per cent of the new elite in Estonia, about 4 per cent in

Lithuania, and about 8 per cent in Latvia. The new nations were run, overwhelmingly, by the people who had run the old republics — and almost not at all by outsiders who rose because the old order fell.

At the very top the continuity is a matter of names. The last effective first secretary of Soviet Lithuania, Algirdas Brazauskas, became the independent republic's acting president in 1992, won the presidency with over 60 per cent of the vote in 1993, served a full term, and was prime minister from 2001 to 2006. The senior communist officeholder of Soviet Estonia through the 1980s, Arnold Rüütel, was President of independent Estonia from 2001 to 2006. The Latvian party secretary Anatolijs Gorbunovs, who had held party positions from 1974 to 1988, was effectively independent Latvia's head of state until 1993 and Speaker of its parliament until 1995. The same men, in the same buildings, under a different flag, elected this time by their own peoples in free elections. The framework's proposition — that the order was a structure of positions and not of beliefs — has never had better evidence anywhere in this series, and here it is not merely argued but *counted*.

And the confirmation is sharpened by what did *not* carry over: the doctrine. Not one proposition of the ideology the nomenklatura had professed survived the transition. The men carried over; the beliefs did not. That is not an embarrassment to the finding but its very point — an appointed elite's loyalty was to the appointing power, so when the appointing power changed, the profession changed with it and *nobody's position was disturbed by the change*. An elite that had spent forty years professing Marxism-Leninism re-emerged professing national independence, democracy, and market reform, and the same people held the same kinds of positions throughout, because the positions were the reality and the professions were the costume. There is no cleaner demonstration in this series of the claim that belief, for the administering elite, is not what holds a settled order together.

THE ELITE THAT OWNED NOTHING
SECTION TEN

The qualification that made the reload partial: a citizenship law

Why this was a selective carry-over, and what selected it.

Two qualifications must be stated at equal weight with the finding, and the second is the sharper and more instructive, because it shows the mechanism being *deliberately steered*.

The first qualification has already been made: the doctrine did not carry over at all, and this is the point rather than a complication. The second is about *nationality*, and it is the instrument that made 1991 a *partial* reload rather than a complete one. The Soviet-era elite of the Baltic republics was not homogeneous; it contained a native segment (Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians who had risen through the republican party) and an imported segment (the all-union factory directors, the second secretaries and their apparatus, the security and military establishment, many of them Russians sent from elsewhere). When the republics became independent, they drew a line through their old elite with a *citizenship law*. Estonia and Latvia restored citizenship to the body of people who had been citizens before the 1940 Soviet annexation, and to their descendants, and required the Soviet-era settler population to naturalise, with language and loyalty requirements — leaving, initially, a large fraction of residents, up to around thirty per cent, without citizenship. Lithuania, which had a much smaller settler population, extended citizenship to essentially all permanent residents.

The effect on the elite was decisive and it is exactly what the framework predicts. The *native* segment of the appointed elite could re-source its positions to the new national order and carry on — and did, in the numbers just given. The *imported* segment — the men of the economic and security chains, the all-union directors and the security and military apparatus — was, in Estonia and Latvia, cut out of the

political nation altogether by the citizenship line, because it could not meet the ancestry or the naturalisation requirements. So the default held for the part of the elite that could be *re-nationalised*, and was severed for the part that could not. This is what distinguishes the Baltic case from Central Asia, where no such line was drawn: there the whole apparatus carried over intact, and the first secretaries simply became presidents for life. In the Baltic, the same test returns the same men — *minus a nationality*. A reload can be selective, and where it is selective, the framework's instruction is to look for the *instrument that selected* — and here the instrument was a statute, a citizenship law, drawing a line through the old elite along the seam of nationality and letting one part through while barring the other.

There is a further turn, which connects this study to the series' work on how orders of *office* become orders of *ownership*. The appointed elite owned nothing; but independence brought *privatisation*, the conversion of state enterprises into private property, and privatisation is precisely the moment when a position can be turned into a possession. Whether the old appointed elite became a new *owning* elite depended, republic by republic, on who drafted the privatisation instrument. Estonia sold its enterprises by open tender to foreigners and residents on equal terms and conducted an early housecleaning of its administration, and its old elite converted its positions into property relatively little. Lithuania ran a voucher privatisation that gave employees priority to buy out their own enterprises and was governed through the decisive mid-1990s by an ex-communist party under which old cadres could keep their positions — which was politically possible, the literature notes, precisely because Lithuanian communism had not been identified with Russian agents and so was not tainted by the nationality question. Latvia's privatisation was fragmentary and slow, its elite an amalgam of old cadres, young careerists, and returning émigrés, and the following decade saw the rise of what the literature frankly calls oligarchs. The pattern is exact and it is the settlement mechanism run in reverse: *the appointed elite became an owning elite to the extent that the privatisation instrument was drafted by insiders.* The Soviet order had converted things into relations, so that nothing could be independently owned or defended; the post-Soviet transition converted relations back into things, and whoever was holding the relevant relation at the moment of conversion had a claim to the thing. This is the moment your correspondent flagged as the test of whether a hierarchy of

office becomes a hierarchy of ownership — and it was decided, in each republic, by the fine print of who wrote the privatisation law.

THE ELITE THAT OWNED NOTHING
SECTION ELEVEN

What the case shows, and where it strains

The two findings, the deeper law, and the honest complications.

What it shows. The Soviet nomenklatura contributes two findings to this series, and they are one structural fact seen from two sides. The first: an order can bind its elite not only by *conferring* a stake that each member would lose on defection, but by *withholding* — by ensuring each member has no independent base of any kind, so that his sole endowment is a revocable position and dissent has no platform to launch from. Binding by withholding produces a *tighter* default than binding by conferral, because there is no base from which a dissent could be funded, and so none is; the Soviet elite was more reliable than any landed aristocracy in this collection precisely because it owned nothing. The second finding is the inversion: an elite bound by withholding is maximally loyal while the centre that issues its positions is solvent, and maximally disposable the instant that centre fails — because its loyalty was to the appointing power, not to the order, so when a new appointing power appears the elite re-sources its positions to it at no cost. The order was a structure of positions, not of beliefs, and the collapse of 1991 proves it with a number: roughly half the new Baltic elite had senior-communist pasts, genuine newcomers were one to eight per cent, three men who had run the republics for the Soviet Union ran them for their own nations — and not one proposition of the abandoned doctrine carried over, which is the point and not the embarrassment.

Beneath the two findings lies a law-shaped generalisation that this study can now state, and it completes from one side something the series had approached from the other. The durability of an elite's loyalty to an order is a function of whether its endowment is a *title that must be defended* or a *registration that merely transfers*. A landed elite holds a title: the order is what makes the title good, so the elite defends

the order in its crisis, and defends it slowly and stubbornly, because losing the order means losing the validation of its property. An appointed elite holds a registration: nothing needs defending, because a position re-registers under any issuer, so the elite abandons the order in its crisis instantly and follows the positions to the new issuer. The landed bind is sticky and slow; the appointed bind is tight and brittle. Between them they mark the two ends of a spectrum on which every ruling elite sits, and the Soviet case, by reaching the pure appointed extreme, lets the whole spectrum be seen.

And the case supplies a further, quieter confirmation of a proposition this series argues elsewhere: that a *province* does not fail the way an independent order fails. Structural change, on the framework's account, comes from inside the hierarchy — fracture, exhaustion, a surplus of claimants the order never seated — and not from the rising of the ruled. The Baltic collapse is that prediction in unusually clean form: the men who cracked the floor were not the people but the very men holding the floor up, acting from the offices the order had installed them in, and they could do it precisely *because* they were appointed rather than titled — a registration transfers, so the men holding the registrations could carry them across the break at no cost to themselves. The ruled did not overthrow the nomenklatura; the nomenklatura re-registered.

Where it strains. Three honest strains, of which the last is the sharpest and must be given full weight.

First, the sourcing has real limits, flagged here as the case itself flags them. The claim that the Baltic was the *laboratory* for the second-secretary institution rests on scholarship whose own dating is inconsistent (Stalin-era introduction in one statement, Khrushchev-era establishment in another), and should be verified in the underlying monograph before anything heavy is built on it. The elite-continuity figures, though traceable to the primary comparative studies (Steen, reported by Matonytė), turn on a *definition* of "nomenklatura": if the term is drawn broadly enough to include ordinary party membership, the figures would measure the size of the party rather than the persistence of the apparatus. The very low upward-mobility numbers (one to eight per cent) suggest the definition is being held tight — you cannot get one per cent newcomers if "nomenklatura" means "anyone with a party card" — but the underlying survey should be checked before the number is leaned on hard.

Second, the "five deaths" of doctrine and the clean carry-over of persons can be overstated. Real change did occur inside the continuity: the men who carried over governed differently, answered to electorates, restored property and law, and joined European institutions, and a picture that sees only the continuity of surnames will have measured the one thing that stayed the same and missed a great deal that did not.

Third, and most important, the counter-position is serious and must be stated at full strength, not as a foil. To read the elite continuity of the 1990s as a "reload" of the same apparatus is, the objection runs, to miss the largest political fact of the period. The men who carried over were not passive survivors of the arrangement; they were, in significant part, the men who *broke* it — at real personal risk, from inside, and were then chosen in free elections by the peoples they had formerly governed unelected. Brazauskas took sixty per cent of a free vote against a candidate the independence movement itself had endorsed; Rüütel helped draft the declaration of sovereignty and was elected president eleven years after the flag came down. These countries became genuine parliamentary democracies, restored private property, joined the European Union and NATO, and did all of it without a civil war. A framework that counts surnames and reports "continuity" risks measuring the one thing that stayed the same and calling it the whole story. This objection is correct on its own terms, and the study's finding does not require it to be false. The finding is narrower and it is about *mechanism, not merit*: that the men who held the positions in 1989 were holding equivalent positions in 1993, and that the reason they *could* is the same reason they had been reliable for the forty years before — a position on a register transfers, a title has to be defended, and this elite had never been given a title. That single mechanism made them, in the same structural instant, the order's most dependable servants and the agents of its dissolution. To explain that is not to diminish what they built after, and the study insists on the distinction.

THE ELITE THAT OWNED NOTHING
SECTION TWELVE

The disciplines: what this analysis must not flatten

Four cautions.

Mechanism is not merit, and the men who carried over include the men who broke it. This is the case's central discipline and it bears repeating because the finding is so easily misheard. To show that the same people held equivalent positions before and after 1991 is a claim about the structural transferability of an appointed position, and nothing more. It is not a claim that nothing changed, not a claim that the carry-over elite was cynical or unchanged in conviction, and emphatically not a suggestion that the independence these men helped win was somehow a mere reshuffling of the old order. Several of them took real risks to break the thing they had served, and were then freely elected by the people they had once ruled without a mandate. The mechanism explains how their *positions* transferred; it says nothing against the genuineness of what they did with them, and a reader who takes the study as a debunking of Baltic independence has read it exactly backwards.

The privileges were real deprivation seen from below, whatever their revocability. This study has dwelt on the *revocability* of the nomenklatura's perquisites — the apartment and car and closed shops that came and went with the position — as the key to the elite's binding. That analytical focus must not obscure what those perquisites *were* from below: a system of stark material inequality in a society officially dedicated to equality, in which a ruling one and a half per cent lived in a reality of decent housing, cars, good medicine, and full shops while the population queued for years for an apartment and stood in line for scarce goods. That the elite's privileges were revocable made the elite reliable; it did not make the privileges just, and the ordinary citizen priced out of them experienced the

nomenklatura not as a cleverly-bound administrative class but as a closed caste of "white people," in the bitter phrase, living within the promised prosperity that everyone else was still being told to build.

The national dimension was domination, not just an administrative variable. The study treats the crossed chains and the citizenship laws somewhat coolly, as instruments of binding and selection. But the thing being administered was the incorporation of three nations into an empire that officially denied being one, against the will of populations that had been independent states within living memory, with mass deportations at the start and Russification throughout. The "governor-general" was a joke the subject elite told about their own subjection, and it was accurate. To analyse the mechanism of that subjection is not to treat it as a neutral case of centre-periphery administration, and the deportations, the demographic engineering, and the suppression of national culture that formed the backdrop to the whole arrangement are not diminished by being, in the framework's terms, the "floor" beneath the pricing of the ordinary subject.

And the framework's reach here is one mechanism, not a theory of the Soviet collapse. The nomenklatura's appointed-elite structure explains one important thing about 1989–91: why the periphery's administering class defected fast and nearly bloodlessly and then largely carried over. It does not explain why the Soviet economy failed, why the centre lost its nerve, why reform escaped its authors' control, or why the whole enormous structure came down when it did — vast questions with large literatures the framework does not address. This study claims a mechanism, not a master key, and the temptation to inflate the one clean finding about elite structure into an explanation of the entire collapse is exactly the kind of overreach the series is built to resist.

Conclusion: the strength that was the weakness

Returning to the puzzle.

The puzzle was that an elite which owned nothing, inherited nothing, and could be dismissed by a telephone call held together more reliably than aristocracies with vast estates to defend — and then, the instant the centre wavered, changed flags almost overnight and largely carried on in place. How could one feature make an elite both the most loyal ruling class in this collection and the most disposable?

The answer is that the reliability and the disposability were the same fact. The Soviet nomenklatura was bound by *withholding* rather than by *conferral*: instead of giving each of its powerful members a stake he would lose on defection, it ensured that he had no stake at all except a revocable position on a list held one level up — no land, no capital, nothing heritable, no independent base of any kind. This made the elite extraordinarily reliable while the centre held, because a man whose only possession is his position cannot fund a dissent without spending the very thing he would be dissenting to protect, and so no dissent is funded; the order achieved the tightest self-reproducing alignment in this series precisely by making its members poor in everything but the position it could revoke. The proof that this was the real mechanism is what the order did to the rare men who began to acquire a second source of standing — the national communists who built a local base of policy and following were purged, under a charge kept ready for exactly that offence, because an independent base was the one thing binding-by-withholding could not permit. And the whole apparatus was arranged, through crossed chains of command, so that no local figure ever held violence, wealth, and information together, and every chain ran back to the same distant city.

But the same withholding that made the elite reliable made it, at the moment of crisis, disposable — because an elite that holds no title has nothing to defend when the order that issued its positions fails, and can simply re-register its positions under whatever new power begins issuing them. A landed elite fights for a dying order because the order validates its property; an appointed elite abandons a dying order instantly, because a position transfers and a title must be defended, and this elite had never been given a title. So the Soviet periphery changed flags in a remarkably short time and with remarkably little blood, and the test of 1991 returns a number that proves the order was a structure of positions and not of beliefs: roughly half the new Baltic elite had senior-communist pasts, genuine newcomers were a handful of per cent, the same men ran the new nations from the same buildings — and not one proposition of the abandoned doctrine survived, because the doctrine was the costume and the position was the reality. The reload was made *partial* only by a citizenship law that drew a line through the old elite along the seam of nationality, letting the native segment re-source its positions to the new nations and cutting out the imported segment that could not be re-nationalised; and the appointed elite became an *owning* elite exactly where insiders drafted the privatisation instrument that turned positions back into property.

The deepest thing the case shows is a law that completes the series' account of elite loyalty from the side it had not yet seen. An elite bound by having something to lose is sticky and slow: it defends its order stubbornly, even resentfully, because its order makes its property good. An elite bound by having nothing is tight and brittle: it holds the order together more perfectly than any landed class while the centre is solvent, and abandons it more completely than any landed class the instant the centre fails — and it is the *same feature*, the revocable positon and nothing else, that produces both. The strength was the weakness. An order that binds its servants by ensuring they have nothing to lose has bought the most reliable elite in the world, on the one condition that it never falters — because the day it falters, it discovers that an elite with nothing to lose has nothing to lose by leaving.

THE ELITE THAT OWNED NOTHING
SOURCES

A note on sources and scholarship

What this rests on, what is standard, what is contested, and what was verified for this study.

The framework. The theory applied here — elite coordination, the *default* (a settled order reproducing itself because each beneficiary in defending his position defends the whole), binding by conferral versus binding by withholding, and the distinction between an elite holding a *title* that must be defended and a *registration* that merely transfers — is developed across the companion papers of this series and applied here; the binding-by-withholding mechanism and the title/registration law are this study's contribution, prompted by the Soviet case. The case itself arrived from a separate project on the Soviet governance of the Baltic, whose independent arrival at the *default* mechanism is treated in the text as evidence rather than assumed.

The nomenklatura and its privileges. The nomenklatura as a system of appointment lists maintained by party committees, covering leading positions across state, economy, military, security, culture, and agriculture, and comprising on the order of one and a half per cent of the population; and the tying of privileges (superior apartments, dachas, cars and drivers, closed distribution shops, sanatoria, superior medical care) to the position rather than to the person — all follow the standard reference literature on the Soviet system and were verified for this study. The parallel establishment of an equivalent nomenklatura system in Communist China by the mid-1950s is noted in the same literature and reinforces the study's point that binding-by-withholding is a specifically modern form, requiring an apparatus able to maintain a register and to have abolished private property.

The Baltic material. The four crossed chains of command in the national republics, and the local elite's private use of the tsarist term "governor-general" for the Moscow-appointed second secretary, follow the work of the historian Saulius

Grybkauskas on the second secretaries of the republican party committees, together with the standard reference accounts; Grybkauskas characterises the institution as, in effect, a contract between the central and the local nomenklatura that proved effective at managing an otherwise difficult relationship. The claim that the second-secretary institution was *first introduced in the Baltic* and later extended across the non-Slavic union is Grybkauskas's, and is flagged in the text as important but not fully settled, because his own statements date it variously to the Stalin and the Khrushchev periods; it should be verified in his monograph before the framework builds on it. This study read the Grybkauskas material through his articles, abstracts, and publisher's descriptions and the secondary literature, not through the full monograph.

The purges. The 1950 purge of the Estonian party leadership and the 1959–62 purge of the Latvian national communists around Eduards Berklavs — including the Berklavs group's programme (Latvian-language requirements for officials, restriction of in-migration, redirection of investment to local needs), Berklavs's prior standing as a favoured and rising figure, his removal in 1959, and the purge of some two thousand party members — follow the scholarship of Michael Loader, William D. Prigge (*The Bearslayers*), and the standard accounts, and were verified for this study. The study explicitly notes the live historiographical dispute over *agency*: the traditional attribution of the purge to Khrushchev's personal order is challenged by Prigge, who argues it was driven by the Stalinist old guard and the Russian military establishment in Latvia, possibly against Khrushchev's preference. The framework's point concerns *what was punished* (the acquisition of an independent local base), which is not affected by the dispute over who drove the punishment.

The 1991 test. The elite-continuity figures — approximately 53 per cent (Estonia) and 55 per cent (Latvia) of the new leadership with a communist and senior-cadre past, about 44 per cent in Lithuania, against "pure" upward mobility of about 1 per cent (Estonia), 4 per cent (Lithuania), and 8 per cent (Latvia) — are Anton Steen's data as reported and discussed by Irmina Matonytė, and were verified for this study against the primary reporting; the definitional caveat (that "nomenklatura" must be held to senior cadre rather than mere party membership for the figures to mean what they are taken to mean) is Matonytė's own and is respected in the text. The apex careers — Brazauskas (last effective first secretary of Soviet Lithuania; acting president 1992; president 1993–98 on over 60 per cent of the vote;

prime minister 2001–06), Rüütel (senior Soviet Estonian officeholder through the 1980s; President of Estonia 2001–06), and Gorbunovs (Latvian party secretary to 1988; effectively head of state to 1993; Speaker to 1995) — follow the reference literature and the republics' own official accounts and were verified. The contrast with Central Asia, where whole apparatuses carried over and first secretaries became presidents for life, follows the comparative literature. The citizenship provisions (restoration of pre-1940 citizenship with naturalisation requirements in Estonia and Latvia, leaving initially up to around 30 per cent of residents without citizenship; extension to all permanent residents in Lithuania) follow the standard literature on citizenship policy in the Baltic states and are noted as politically contested in their framing. The privatisation and lustration comparisons follow the comparative studies of Baltic capitalism and post-communist corruption paths.

Contested and interpretive. The central analytical claims — binding-by-withholding as a distinct mechanism producing a tighter and more brittle default than binding-by-conferral; the title/registration distinction as the general law of elite loyalty behind both; and the reading of the 1991 continuity as confirmation that the order was a structure of positions and not of beliefs — are this framework's interpretation, offered in its own terms and testable against the record, not settled scholarly consensus. The strongest counter-position — that the carry-over men were the *breakers* of the order, freely elected, who built genuine democracies, so that a continuity-counting frame measures the wrong thing — is stated at full strength in the text and is *not* disputed; the study's finding is expressly narrowed to mechanism rather than merit to keep the two from being confused. The Grybkauskas "Baltic as laboratory" claim and the definitional basis of the continuity figures are the two points most in need of further verification, and are flagged as such.

On what is not attempted. This study makes no claim to original historical research, and it explicitly does not attempt to explain the Soviet collapse as a whole — the economic failure, the loss of nerve at the centre, the escape of reform from its authors — which are vast questions outside the framework's remit. Its contribution is a single mechanism (binding by withholding) and its inversion (instant disposability), tested against an unusually clean natural experiment (the elite continuity of 1991) that returns a number. Where the framework and the record disagree, the record wins; where the finding risks being misheard as a verdict on the merit of Baltic independence rather than the mechanism of position-transfer, the

distinction is insisted upon; and that distinction — mechanism, not merit — is the part of this study its author considers most important to keep.